United Nations

Press Release

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to resume negotiations in Pretoria on return of South African exiles.

- UNHCR officials call for urgent international assistance to save thousands of lives in Ethiopia and to help hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese refugees.

- Inspection team to visit Iraq to continue survey of nuclear materials and facilities.

- Speakers in Economic and Social Council's Social Committee focus on substitutions for drug crops; other anti-drug programmes.

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A United Nations press officer in Geneva reported today that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would resume negotiations this week in Pretoria on the return of South African exiles.

The Director of the UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Africa, Nicholas Bwakira, who will be leading a delegation from UNHCR, told the press officer that the purpose of the mission would be to negotiate the general amnesty for South African refugees who wished to repatriate voluntarily to return to South Africa.

Mr. Bwakira said the Agency had already obtained from the South African Government the agreement that UNHCR will be able to establish a presence in South Africa. However, he said, the Agency needed to make sure the refugees would be returning under conditions of safety and dignity for the purpose of which an amnesty law -- an amnesty promulgation -- was required. Under such a law the South African Government would guarantee that no one who comes under UNHCR auspices will be prosecuted for crimes committed before going into exile or while in exile, he said.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

The estimated cost is about $40 million for the repatriation of the 40,000 refugees and exiles.

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United Nations officials say more international assistance is urgently needed to save thousands of lives in Ethiopia and to help hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese refugees who fled the recent conflict in Ethiopia.

Just back from a United Nations assessment mission to the region, UNHCR Regional Director for Africa, Nicholas Bwakira, told a press officer in Geneva that the serious refugee situation in the Horn of Africa had become "dramatic" in the wake of recent political developments in Ethiopia.

An estimated 300,000 soldiers of the former Ethiopian regime had been displaced within Ethiopia or had fled to Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya, Mr Mr. Bwakira was reported to say. In addition, thousands of Somali and Sudanese refugees who had sought asylum in Ethiopia had fled the Ethiopian conflict and were returning to their countries, he said.

The Geneva-based press officer said the United Nations inter-agency mission, which was headed by World Food Programme Director James Ingram, would be launching an updated appeal shortly.

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A team of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), supported and assisted by experts provided by the Special Commission established by Security Council resolution 687 (1991), is on its way to Iraq to continue the inspection of that country's nuclear capabilities that was begun in May.

The mission will be visiting sites in and near the Tuwaitha research site, 30 kilometres from Baghdad, as well as other sites newly designated by the Special Commission on the basis of information that has recently become available. The team, which includes specialists in various nuclear-related disciplines, will be continuing the survey begun by the first mission of nuclear materials and facilities in Iraq as required by the Security Council resolution.

The outcome of the visit will be reflected in a report which the Director-General of IAEA will make to the Security Council, through the Secretary-General. Neither the Agency nor the team will be making any public statement until the visit is completed.

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The need for crop substitution as a means of combating drug production was highlighted by several speakers this morning as the Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council continued its exchange of views on drug-related issues.

The representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said that such programmes should be part of an integrated rural development approach that would consider crop substitution in a broader social and economic context.

Speakers this morning expressed support for the work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and for the newly created United Nations International Drug Control Programme, as well as for the restructuring of United Nations drug units, the proposed expansion of the Commission's membership from 40 to 50, and the need for equal attention to be directed towards demand as well as supply of drugs.

Among those addressing the Committee yesterday, the Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, Giorgio Giacomelli, said the recent session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs saw a positive approach to the future that was moving, within the forum of the United Nations system, into a new era of international drug abuse control.

During last year, he said, the Fund for Drug Abuse Control had provided assistance to 67 individual countries through over 100 country-specific drug control programmes. Most of the new programmes that had been added this year, he said, were in Africa and the Caribbean, while the Fund's major assistance continued to be concentrated in Latin America and in South-East and South-West Asia.

Also making a statement yesterday, the President of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), Oskar Schroeder, said a number of positive developments had emerged last year, including the decrease in the abuse of some drugs in several countries. Also, he said, concerted action to combat money-laundering and to control precursors and chemicals essential for illicit drug manufacture had been energized in the wake of the entry into force of the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances last November.

Despite the positive elements, he went on to say, the situation worldwide regarding illicit production, trafficking and abuse remained grave, generating a high level of violence and environmental devastation, among other things. Even more lethal was the spread of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection among intravenous drug users and the increasing number of children born to abuser mothers.

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